

Senate Bill 1179

Salvadorean Physicians Program

Senator Caroline Menjivar (D – San Fernando Valley)

SUMMARY

SB 1179 seeks to address the bilingual physician workforce shortage in California by mirroring the existing Mexican Physicians program and allowing Physicians from El Salvador to provide care in disenfranchised communities for a limited time.

PROBLEM

The United States stands to experience a physician shortfall of 86,000 by 2036.¹ The numbers are even worse when considering physicians with cultural competency and bilingual expertise. This is compounded by the increased need for physicians amid the growth and aging of the U.S. population,² combined with low pay and relative lack of notoriety associated with primary care.³

Language competency is tied to key determinants of health, as these linguistic connections are directly linked to better interpersonal communication, improved access to care, mutual trust, and ultimately improved satisfaction in patient-doctor relationships.⁴ The report determined that if the state maintains the rates that we are in, it will take approximately 5 centuries to fully address the disparities.⁵

According to the California Healthcare Workforce Commission, approximately 7 million Californians live in a Health Professional Shortage Area, a federal designation for counties that have a shortage of primary care, dental, or mental health care providers. To address this, the federal government has designated Federally Qualified Health Centers (FQHCs), also known as Community Health Centers, as primary care clinics that receive federal funds to provide healthcare services to underserved populations. While there is a strong need to serve these areas, the reality is that these centers are placed in a difficult position. To provide a positive learning experience for trainees, they have to call upon an already overextended primary care

workforce to spend time training and teaching the next generation of physicians.⁶

BACKGROUND

Given California's workforce shortage over the years, the state has sought innovative ways to ease the burden. One of those initiatives has been integrating physicians from Mexico through the Licensed Physicians and Dentists from Mexico Pilot program established in AB 1045 (Firebaugh Chapter 1157, Statutes of 2002). While it took many years to stand up the program due to structural issues, the program became permanent in 2024. Recent legislation, AB 2860 (Garcia, Chapter 246, Statutes of 2024), addressed capacity issues and raised the number of doctors from 30 to 125 beginning in 2025.

The University of California, Davis, was tasked with evaluating the Mexico Dentist and Doctor program, and it documented its findings in its final August 2025 Annual report.⁷ They found that many patients had positive experiences due to cultural and linguistic alignment, which helped build greater rapport and improve access to services. Additionally, they concluded that health care was more accessible and that discontinuing the program would have devastating consequences for participating FQHCs, severely compromising their ability to deliver timely, high-quality, and accessible care to the patients they serve.

SOLUTION

SB 1179 will replicate the existing proven framework for the Mexico Physicians Program and extend it to doctors from El Salvador to provide care in Federally Qualified Health Centers and any corresponding hospitals serving underserved communities for a maximum period of 3 years.

Specifically,

¹ Adashi EY, O'Mahony DP, Gruppuso PA. The National Physician Shortage: Disconcerting HRSA and AAMC Reports. *J Gen Intern Med.* 2025 Nov;40(14):3469-3472. doi: 10.1007/s11606-025-09575-7. Epub 2025 May 6. PMID: 40329027; PMCID: PMC12586245.

² Adashi EY, O'Mahony DP, Gruppuso PA. The National Physician Shortage: Disconcerting HRSA and AAMC Reports. *J Gen Intern Med.* 2025 Nov;40(14):3469-3472. doi: 10.1007/s11606-025-09575-7. Epub 2025 May 6. PMID: 40329027; PMCID: PMC12586245.

³ [California's primary care shortage persists despite ambitious moves to close gap - Los Angeles Times](#)

⁴ <https://latino.ucla.edu/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/LPPI-CPS-Summary.pdf>

⁵ <https://latino.ucla.edu/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/LPPI-CPS-Summary.pdf>

⁶ <https://futurehealthworkforce.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/10/FutureHealthWorkforceCommission-FinalReport.pdf>

⁷ [lmpo-final-report.pdf](#)

- The physicians must be licensed, certified, or recertified and in good standing in the applicable medical specialty in El Salvador and meet the same requirements that were applied under the Mexico Physicians Program.
- The physicians would be required to undergo the same orientation structure that includes medical protocols, Community Clinic history and operations, Medical Administration, Medical ethics, and California Medical delivery systems.
- The participating locations would be required to work with a California Medical school or residency program to conduct secondary reviews and ensure compliance with the program and Medical Quality Assurance protocols.

STATUS

Introduced- February 18, 2026

SUPPORT

Clínica Monseñor Oscar A. Romero (Co-Sponsor)
California Primary Care Association (Co-Sponsor)

CONTACT

Kimberly Fuentes
Office of Senator Caroline Menjivar
(916) 651-4020

